**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**
**TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**

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**Before the**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**
**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**

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Good morning Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member King, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the covert testing of security screening checkpoints at airports.

**Overview of Covert Testing**

Since it assumed responsibility for aviation security screening at airports, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has always recognized the value and importance of covert testing to measure TSA's screening performance and identify areas that require improvement. Covert testing is a tool to identify vulnerabilities in the system and uncover weaknesses of training, procedures or technology. The primary purpose of covert testing is not to test an individual officer or airport, but to act as a measure of system-wide effectiveness and drive improvement through training, procedures, and technology.

Covert testing of TSA's screening operations is performed by several organizations within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS): TSA's Office of Inspection (OI), the Office of Inspector General Office, and TSA's Office of Security Operations (OSO).

OI conducts extensive covert tests around the nation with no notice to local or headquarters officials. These expert testers are trained in the latest methods of smuggling bombs, bomb parts and weapons through checkpoints using techniques acquired by national and international intelligence partners and gathered through years of experience. The OI covert testing staff includes former Transportation Security Officers (TSO) who have on-the-ground experience in screening passengers. Airports are selected based on a number of factors, including intelligence reports, threats to aviation, and the airport environment. All airports are subject to no-notice testing by OI. To date, OI has tested at over 830 airports and conducted in excess of 22,000 covert tests. In 2008, OI will conduct over one thousand covert tests, continually restructured to reflect the current terrorist threat, at over 100 airports to assess our security vulnerabilities. For safety purposes airport law enforcement are notified prior to testing. Once testing starts, TSA management is made aware of the situation in accordance with established policies and

protocols, which do not permit advanced notice to TSOs and who are thus subjected to no-notice testing. After testing is completed, agents discuss the results with TSOs and local TSA officials and provide additional training to TSOs to raise vulnerability awareness and improve security operations.

In addition to OI testing, DHS IG also conducts hundreds of covert tests at airports from coast to coast and acts completely independently from TSA. DHS IG agents measure the effectiveness of screening protocols and communicate these results to TSA and the Department in order to increase effectiveness of screening and security. TSA uses these independent results to validate and improve training.

Beginning in April of this year, TSA established the Aviation Screening Assessment Program (ASAP) within OSO to greatly expand our internal covert testing and provide statistically sound data to support operational decisions. This program arose out of a recognition that, notwithstanding the valuable information learned from the extensive covert testing conducted by OI and others, TSA nevertheless needed a more systematic framework to more accurately assess the effectiveness of our screening process and to identify which aspects of the process require improvement. This program has performed thousands of covert tests at hundreds of airports nationwide in just six months. We are testing virtually every aspect of the screening process, including the detection of prohibited liquids and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Under separate training programs, TSA additionally conducts over a thousand covert exercises focused on detecting IEDs and almost 70,000 electronic image tests—*every day*. The information collected from these programs enables TSA to make informed decisions based on reliable data to better target our efforts to improve the screening process. ASAP will enhance our ability to identify which aspects of the screening process needs improvement: operations, procedures, technology, training, or management. And, we now have a formal process to conduct a thorough assessment of the screening process every six months and implement the appropriate courses of action to address any concerns revealed during the expansive covert testing.

Because of this array of testing efforts, our TSOs are among the most tested workforce in the country. TSOs are literally tested every day, on every shift, at every checkpoint in every lane across over 400 airports around the United States.

**Maintaining the Integrity of Covert Testing**

I would also like to address concerns raised by recent media reports on the integrity of the covert testing of screening operations. The value of covert testing relies upon the testers' ability to perform unannounced tests. We take great care to protect the covert nature of the testing to ensure the data is an accurate measure of the screening system's performance. We treat covert testing results very seriously because these results help us identify vulnerabilities in the system and implement corrective measures to prevent another terrorist attack. We routinely provide very limited notice to local law enforcement in certain circumstances involving real threat items for safety reasons so as

to avoid endangering airline passengers, flight crews, and our own workforce which, unbeknownst to any of them, are in the immediate area of a covert test. TSOs should not be given advanced notice of covert testing. Indeed, advanced notice to TSOs from a TSA employee is a violation of established policies and protocols, and defeats the purpose of covert testing.

Mr. Chairman, I understand that you are aware of a specific matter involving a TSA-internal "NETHUB" communication on April 28, 2006, currently under investigation by the DHS IG. We are fully cooperating with the investigation and will appropriately address any findings of the investigation. NETHUB is a division within TSA's Office of Security Operations created in the spring of 2006 that serves a central communications conduit between TSA Headquarters and our field operations at over 400 airports. NETHUB sends and receives communications by email, telephone and fax on operational and administrative matters, such as distributing new screening procedures and security directives, announcing opportunities for employees to serve on national advisory councils, and various data requests from field operations.

**Conclusion**

In addition to Innovation and Team Spirit, Integrity is one of the three core values of TSA. We require our personnel to conduct themselves in an honest, trustworthy and ethical manner at all times. Maintaining the integrity of covert tests of our screening operations is essential for TSA to gain the type of information necessary to continually improve and adapt our screening processes to stay ahead of terrorists. Any individual action to compromise the integrity of covert testing is extremely short-sighted and contrary to TSA's mission of providing an effective security system to protect aviation.

Chairman Thompson, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to respond to the Committee's questions.